



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Laura Hayes
202-224-4515

Baucus Praises Plans to Launch FTA Talks with Andean Countries

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) U.S. Senator Max Baucus today made the following statement in praise of the announcement by U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Robert Zoellick that the United States plans to launch negotiations for a free trade agreement with the four Andean countries – Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia:

“Earlier this year, I urged Ambassador Zoellick to consider a Free Trade Agreement with Colombia. In light of the failed WTO ministerial in Cancun, it is more important than ever that the United States pursue free trade agreements with countries that offer significant commercial opportunities.

Colombia is one such a country. It is already the third largest purchaser of American agricultural products in the hemisphere. With further trade liberalization, an FTA with Colombia has the potential to generate significant commercial benefits for American workers, farmers, and businesses.

Also including Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia in the FTA negotiations makes good sense because it adds to the commercial significance of the agreement and is an efficient use of USTR’s negotiating resources. With so many trade priorities vying for attention, I urge the USTR to set up a negotiating structure that maximizes the potential efficiencies of engaging the four Andean countries at once. That will leave more resources free to pursue our multilateral agenda in the WTO and the FTAA and to enforce existing trade agreements.

Today’s announcement is also important because it demonstrates how U.S. trade preference programs can evolve over time into fully reciprocal free trade agreements. While some claim that unilateral preferences make beneficiary countries reluctant to liberalize their markets, experience shows the opposite to be true.

First the countries of the South African Customs Union – beneficiaries of trade preferences under the African Growth and Opportunity Act – and now the four beneficiary countries of the Andean Trade Preferences Act have proved eager to negotiate comprehensive trade agreements with the United States. I am confident that the same would be true of the preference program that Senator McCain and I have proposed for the Middle East.”

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